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NEWS SERVICE

DISTRIBUTION II

Sam Adams

±†NIGHTLEAD INTELLIGENCE±
†BY WILLIAM SCALLY±
WASHINGTON, SEP 18, REUTER - U.S. INTELLIGENCE DELIBERATELY DOWNGRADED THE SIZE OF VIETCONG FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM PRIOR TO THE 1968 TET OFFENSIVE, IN AN EFFORT TO FOOL THE AMERICAN PRESS, PUBLIC AND CONGRESS, THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE WAS TOLD TODAY.
SAMUEL ADAMS, A FORMER CIA ANALYST, WHO SPECIALIZED IN ESTIMATING VIETCONG TROOP STRENGTH, TOLD THE COMMITTEE ''THE TET SURPRISE STEMMED IN LARGE MEASURE FROM CORRUPTION IN THE INTELLIGENCE PROCESS.''
THE JANUARY, 1968, OFFENSIVE MARKED A TURNING POINT IN THE U.S. ROLE IN VIETNAM..
MR. ADAMS, WHO RESIGNED FROM THE CIA IN 1973 AFTER 10 YEARS SERVICE, TOLD THE COMMITTEE THAT IN THE MONTHS BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE, U.S. INTELLIGENCE HAD DELIBERATELY DOWNGRADED THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNIST FORCES IN ORDER TO PORTRAY THE VIETCONG AS WEAKER THAN THEY ACTUALLY WERE.

±†NIGHTLEAD INTELLIGENCE 2 WASHINGTON±
''ALTHOUGH OUR AIM WAS TO FOOL THE AMERICAN PRESS, THE PUBLIC AND THE CONGRESS, WE IN INTELLIGENCE SUCCEEDED BEST IN FOOLING OURSELVES,'' HE SAID.
MR. ADAMS WAS THE LATEST WITNESS TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COMMITTEE TO TESTIFY IN THE PANEL'S ASSESSMENT OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES.
IN HIS STATEMENT HE SAID THAT IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1966, HE FOUND DOCUMENTS AT CIA HEADQUARTERS SUGGESTING THAT THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM WAS CLOSE TO 600,000 -- DOUBLE THE OFFICIAL NUMBER OF 300,000.
BUT HE SAID THAT THE U.S. COMMAND IN VIETNAM, FEARING PUBLIC REACTION TO THE HIGHER NUMBERS WAS ''LOBBYING TO KEEP THE ESTIMATE AT ITS OFFICIAL LEVELS.''
IN JULY, 1967, HE SAID THEY BEGAN TO ''SCALE DOWN'' THE NUMBER OF VIETCONG SOLDIERS IN THE OFFICIAL ORDER OF BATTLE.
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MR. ADAMS SAID THAT A ''SECRET, EYES-ONLY CABLE THAT GENERAL CREIGHTON ABRAMS SENT FROM SAIGON TO GENERAL EARL WHEELER, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, INDICATED THE NEW HIGHER NUMBERS WERE ''IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE CURRENT OVERALL STRENGTH FIGURE OF ABOUT 299,000 GIVEN TO THE PRESS HERE.''

MR. ADAMS SAID THAT GENERAL ABRAMS ''THEREUPON SUGGESTED DROPPING TWO CATEGORIES OF VC FROM THE STRENGTH ESTIMATE IN ORDER TO KEEP IT AT ITS OLD LEVEL. THE MAIN REASON FOR THIS, HE INDICATED, WAS 'PRESS REACTION.'''

MR. ADAMS TOLD THE COMMITTEE THAT 20 DAYS LATER, IN SEPTEMBER, 1967, AN INTELLIGENCE CONFERENCE IN SAIGON CONCLUDED WITH THE CIA ''CAVING IN AND SIGNING AN AGREEMENT WHICH KEPT THE ENEMY FORCE ESTIMATE AT ITS OLD SIZE.''

ON NOVEMBER 27, 1967, MR. ADAMS SAID, THE CIA IN A MEMORANDUM FROM SAIGON IN EFFECT PREDICTED THE TET OFFENSIVE.

MR. ADAMS SAID HE ADDED COMMENTS POINTING OUT THAT THOUSANDS OF VIETCONG HAD BEEN OMITTED FROM THE STRENGTH ESTIMATE BUT THAT THE MEMO THAT WAS FORWARDED TO THE WHITE HOUSE ''FAILED TO MENTION THAT SOMETHING MIGHT BE AMRY WITH OFFICIAL STRENGTH ESTIMATES.''+

HE SAID THAT ON THE DAY OF THE TET OFFENSIVE, JANUARY 30, 1968, HE DRAFTED A MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTING HIS RESIGNATION STATING THAT THE OFFICIAL VIETCONG ESTIMATE WAS ''A MONUMENT OF DECEIT.''

IN ADDITION, HE DRAFTED A CABLE THAT CONCLUDED IT WAS ''SOMETHING OF AN ANOMALY TO BE TAKING SO MUCH PUNISHMENT FROM COMMUNIST SOLDIERS WHOSE EXISTENCE IS NOT OFFICIALLY ACKNOWLEDGED.''

HE SAID THE DRAFT CABLE WAS LATER RETURNED TO HIM WITH A SUGGESTION THAT HE HOLD IT UNTIL THINGS QUIETED DOWN.

MR. ADAMS SAID THAT ONE OF THE RESULTS OF UNDERESTIMATING VIETCONG STRENGTH WAS THE DESTRUCTION OR DAMAGING OF SOME 1,200 AMERICAN AIRCRAFT IN VIETNAM BY SHRAPNEL FROM ARTILLERY SHELLS.

HE SAID THIS WAS TOTALLY UNEXPECTED PROBABLY BECAUSE SO FEW VIETCONG ARTILLERY UNITS WERE CARRIED IN THE ORDER OF BATTLE -- ''EVEN THOUGH EVIDENCE WAS ABUNDANT THAT THERE WERE MANY.''

HE SAID THE RESULT WAS THAT THE PLANNERS HAD FAILED TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE PROTECTION FOR THE PLANE.+

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